

From tool to artifact, without missing a beat

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For the past 35 years, Betty Martinez, with the Inert Component Fabrication group, has used the same instrument to test coax cables to ensure their safety. The testing is necessary since the Lab both creates its own cables as well as modifies pre-existing cables coming in from vendors for specific needs at the Lab's firing sites. While Betty indicated the equipment was already at the Lab when she started here, property records indicate it was purchased way back in March of 1958. The ancient (but still working) equipment is now being transferred to the Museum as part of its artifacts collection while a much newer appliance with the same function takes its place.

The Lab has a continuing need to test cables (in this case associated with explosives testing research) since the work relates to the Lab's national mission. While cables delivered directly from vendors would have already been tested, once they've been modified to meet the Lab's specific criteria, they need to be checked again to make sure they work as expected. Testing is even more important for any electrical cables the Lab creates from scratch. In addition to helping ensure that workers handling the insulated

wires are not exposed to potentially hazardous currents, Betty is also checking, for instance, to make sure current is flowing through them as expected.

While Betty and her coworkers at one time tested around 100 cables a day, now it's more around 100 a week. The cables themselves can be anywhere from a few inches in length to more than 300 feet long, depending on their applications. In addition to testing equipment for Lab employees, Betty and her coworkers also check cables for a sister Lab, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California.

While she now only works a couple of days a week, Betty still enjoys her job, which also includes the fabrication, molding, encasing and soldering of other items needed at the Lab.

Prior to coming to Los Alamos, Betty spent time at Atari (a pioneering video game company) and built cables for Eberline Instruments in Santa Fe.

While working with electricity can be hazardous, Betty indicates she has never been injured while performing her tasks. She attributes her extensive training to helping keep her safe while at the Lab.

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